

Ask a psychotherapist

Question: My moods are all over the place. One day I'm really happy and the next, even though nothing bad has happened, I'm a mess ? sad, angry, hopeless. I don't seem to have any control of these changes and some of my friends are calling me a ?schizo?. Does that mean I have multiple personalities?

Answer: There's a lot of confusion among the general public about the meanings of the terms ?schizophrenic?, ?multiple personality? and ?manic depression. Schizophrenia, contrary to popular opinion, is not about having a split personality but rather about losing touch with reality from time to time or more consistently. These breaks, often in the form of visual or aural hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't really there) are known as psychoses. Since psychoses are usually indications that something chemical is amiss in the brain, medication is the primary option for treating schizophrenia. Manic Depression, now called Bi-Polar Disorder, is characterized by significant mood swings from depression to euphoria or even intense irritability. Swings between moods can be rapid or take place over a period of months. Sometimes there is a seasonal pattern to the mood changes. Bi-Polar Disorder usually responds well to medication as it also is indicative of chemical imbalances in the brain. Both Schizophrenia and Bi-Polar Disorder have a genetic component so that if a near relative has been diagnosed with one of these, your own chance of having it increases. Multiple Personality Disorder, now called Dissociative Identity Disorder, is a response to a highly damaging environment. It tends to develop in people who have been severely abused in childhood often over long periods of time. Signs of Dissociative Identity Disorder include but are not limited to significant memory gaps especially from childhood, flashbacks of terrifying incidents, and being unable to account for time spent or purchases made in the present. Long-term psychotherapy is required. Only a qualified therapist can distinguish between these three serious conditions. Alison Kerr, Ph.D., Psychotherapist can be reached at 905 936-2400 or at alikerr@xplornet.ca